

DOI: 10.15276/ETR.04.2026.6
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22725639
UDC: 316.77:005.334
JEL: D81, M10, M12, M14

Received: 2025-06-26, Revised: 2026-07-23, Accepted: 2026-08-02, Published: 2026-08-26

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND LEADERSHIP LEGITIMACY IN CRISIS DECISION-MAKING: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ANIME SERIES MY HERO ACADEMIA

ІНСТИТУЦІЙНА ДОВІРА ТА ЛЕГІТИМНІСТЬ ЛІДЕРСТВА В УМОВАХ ПРИЙНЯТТЯ КРИЗОВИХ УПРАВЛІНСЬКИХ РІШЕНЬ: НАРАТИВНИЙ АНАЛІЗ АНІМЕ-СЕРІАЛУ MY HERO ACADEMIA

Oleksandr P. Krupskyi, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor
Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Dnipro, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0002-1086-9274
Email: krupskyi71@gmail.com

Maria N. Cunha, Ph.D. in Business Sciences, Professor at ISMT
Instituto Superior Miguel Torga, Coimbra, Portugal
ORCID: 0000-0002-1291-231X
Email: 1736@ufp.edu.pt

Yuliia M. Stasiuk
Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Dnipro, Ukraine
ORCID: 0000-0001-6644-8658
Email: stas.yul@gmail.com

Крупський О.П., Кунья М.Н., Стасюк Ю.М. Інституційна довіра та легітимність лідерства в умовах прийняття кризових управлінських рішень: наративний аналіз аніме-серіалу My Hero Academia. Науково-методична стаття.

У статті досліджено взаємозв'язок між інституційною довірою, легітимністю лідерства та кризовими управлінськими рішеннями на матеріалі аніме-серіалу My Hero Academia. Застосовано якісний наративний аналіз перших шести сезонів серіалу. Встановлено, що персоніфікація суспільної довіри в образі All Might забезпечує короткострокову стабільність системи професійних героїв, але водночас формує її залежність від авторитету одного символічного лідера. Його відставка спричиняє кризу наступництва та поширення недовіри на всю інституційну систему. Обґрунтовано, що відновлення легітимності потребує прозорості кризової комунікації, інституційної безперервності, розподіленого лідерства та колективної відповідальності.

Ключові слова: інституційна довіра, легітимність лідерства, кризові управлінські рішення, кризова комунікація, символічне лідерство, наративний аналіз, My Hero Academia.

Krupskyi O.P., Cunha M.N., Stasiuk Yu.M. Institutional Trust and Leadership Legitimacy in Crisis Decision-Making: A Narrative Analysis of the Anime Series My Hero Academia. Scientific and methodical article.

The article examines the relationship between institutional trust, leadership legitimacy, and crisis decision-making through the anime series My Hero Academia. A qualitative narrative analysis of the first six seasons was conducted. The findings demonstrate that the personalization of public trust in All Might provides short-term stability for the professional hero system while making it dependent on the authority of a single symbolic leader. His retirement generates a succession crisis and extends distrust to the wider institutional system. Restoring legitimacy therefore requires transparent crisis communication, institutional continuity, distributed leadership, and collective responsibility.

Keywords: institutional trust, leadership legitimacy, crisis decision-making, crisis communication, symbolic leadership, narrative analysis, My Hero Academia

The contemporary management environment is characterized by high levels of instability, information overload, and organizational reputational vulnerability. Under these conditions, crises increasingly arise not only from financial or operational disruptions but also from a loss of trust in the organization, its leadership, and its decision-making system (Marks, 2023). The digitalization of the communication environment, the rapid expansion of social media, and organizations' constant presence in the public information space considerably accelerate the formation of crisis narratives that may destabilize stakeholder relationships even in the absence of critical material losses (Badu et al., 2023). Trust is therefore becoming not only a socio-psychological phenomenon but also a strategic management resource directly related to an organization's ability to maintain resilience, legitimacy, and managerial effectiveness during crises (Eaddy et al., 2025).

In contemporary crises, a substantial share of management decisions is implemented within a space of symbolic interpretations, public evaluations, and media coverage of organizational activity. Mass media, digital platforms, and social networks not only disseminate information about a crisis but also shape dominant narratives concerning organizational responsibility, competence, and moral legitimacy (Liang & Huang, 2023). Crisis management consequently depends increasingly on leaders' ability to sustain trust through transparent communication,

demonstrated accountability, and consistency between managerial actions and public expectations (Kumalasari et al., 2024). The personalization of organizational trust is particularly significant: when the reputational stability of a system is excessively concentrated around an individual charismatic leader, the risk of destabilization increases if that person is discredited, loses authority, or becomes physically absent (Xiao et al., 2025).

Alongside the global transformation of crisis management, interest is growing in the use of media narratives as a means of analysing organizational processes, leadership models, and managerial conflicts. Contemporary graphic narratives, serialized media products, and visual stories are increasingly regarded not merely as elements of popular culture but as forms that represent organizational behaviour, corporate values, ethical dilemmas, and crisis-management situations (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). Narrative structures make it possible to model complex decision-making processes, reveal conflicts between formal procedures and moral responsibility, and represent the relationship between organizational culture and leadership behaviour (Krupskiy & Stasiuk, 2023). Media narratives can therefore serve as an analytical environment for interpreting crises of trust and managerial responses to them (Gerde & Foster, 2007).

Despite the considerable body of research on crisis management, organizational trust, and crisis communication, insufficient attention has been paid to crisis management decisions through the lens of media narratives as models representing organizational behaviour. Research combining the loss of organizational trust, symbolic leadership, and crisis decision-making in interpretations of contemporary media products remains particularly limited (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022; Page et al., 2023). This gap highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach integrating crisis management, organizational trust, narrative analysis, and organizational culture.

Analysis of recent publications on the problem

Contemporary crisis-management research is increasingly shifting its focus from exclusively operational or financial aspects of organizational activity towards trust, legitimacy, and the symbolic resilience of management systems. In academic discourse, a crisis is increasingly understood not only as the consequence of flawed management decisions or external destabilizing factors but also as a process that erodes stable mechanisms of interaction between an organization and its stakeholders. Under such conditions, organizational trust, the perceived legitimacy of managerial decisions, crisis communication, and the role of leadership in sustaining organizational stability become particularly important (Marks, 2023; Badu et al., 2023).

At the same time, the use of media narratives to interpret complex social and organizational processes is attracting increasing interest in the humanities and management studies. Narrative and visual forms of

representation can model managerial conflicts, ethical dilemmas, decision-making mechanisms, and organizational responses to crises. This is especially relevant in a digitalized communication environment, where public perceptions of a crisis are shaped not only by actual managerial actions but also by media images of the organization, its leaders, and its institutional behaviour (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). The following literature review is therefore structured around three interrelated areas: trust as a factor in organizational resilience, crises of trust in contemporary management, and media narratives as a means of representing organizational processes.

Trust as an Element of Organizational Resilience.

In contemporary management, trust is increasingly regarded not only as a socio-psychological phenomenon of interpersonal interaction but also as a strategic organizational resource that directly affects the ability to maintain stability, adaptability, and effective functioning under uncertainty. In a crisis environment, trust largely determines the speed of managerial decision-making, the level of coordination among structural units, employees' willingness to support organizational change, and the organization's capacity to preserve legitimacy in its relations with stakeholders (Marks, 2023). This has prompted a gradual shift from treating trust as a subsidiary element of organizational behaviour to recognizing it as a key factor in organizational resilience.

In academic research, organizational trust is generally associated with an organization's ability to create a predictable, stable, and comprehensible environment for interaction among employees, managers, and external stakeholders. Organizational trust reduces transaction costs associated with control, facilitates coordination, and improves the effectiveness of internal communication (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022). It becomes particularly important during crises, when the speed of response to external threats largely depends on employees' willingness to support managerial decisions despite incomplete information or high uncertainty. In such situations, trust stabilizes organizational behaviour and helps preserve the functional integrity of the system.

Institutional trust is another important component of contemporary research and describes the degree of public confidence in an organization's ability to act competently, predictably, and responsibly. Unlike interpersonal trust, it is formed not only through direct experience but also through organizational reputation, public communication, symbolic image, and conformity with the expectations of the social environment (Eaddy et al., 2025). Contemporary crises therefore increasingly have not only operational but also reputational and legitimacy-related dimensions. Even without critical material losses, an organization may lose governability when trust in its decisions, procedures, or managerial competence is undermined. In this context, crisis management gradually becomes a process of sustaining institutional legitimacy and managing public perceptions of the organization.

A separate strand of research concerns leadership legitimacy and the leader's role as a source of symbolic

organizational stability. In contemporary organizations, leaders perform not only administrative or coordinating functions but also represent the values, competence, and moral reliability of the system as a whole. This is especially characteristic of crisis situations, in which employees and external stakeholders evaluate organizational effectiveness through the behaviour of its leadership (Vázquez-Martínez et al., 2024). Excessive personalization of trust creates additional risks to organizational resilience because a leader's loss of authority may automatically develop into a crisis of trust in the entire management system. At the same time, crisis-management research indicates that a high level of leadership legitimacy can substantially reduce the destabilizing impact of crisis events by supporting organizational cohesion and limiting internal disorganization (Badu et al., 2023).

Within contemporary approaches to organizational resilience, trust is increasingly viewed as an intangible strategic asset that enables an organization to adapt to

crisis-related change, maintain the continuity of management processes, and restore effectiveness after destabilizing events. Organizational resilience is shaped not only by material resources, technologies, or formal procedures but also by the system's ability to sustain collective confidence in the value of joint action and managerial decisions (Marks, 2023). Research on organizational behaviour and crisis management therefore increasingly incorporates trust into analyses of organizational adaptability, crisis leadership, and strategic risk management. Synthesizing approaches to organizational trust, institutional trust, and leadership legitimacy makes it possible to regard trust as a multilevel element of organizational resilience that simultaneously affects internal coordination, the legitimacy of management decisions, and an organization's capacity to maintain stability during crises. The principal levels of organizational trust and their effects on organizational resilience are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Levels of Trust within an Organization and Their Effects on Organizational Resilience

Level of trust	Description	Effect on organizational resilience
Interpersonal trust	Trust between employees and managers	Improves coordination and the speed of interaction
Organizational trust	Trust in internal procedures and the management system	Supports the stability of management processes
Institutional trust	External stakeholders' trust in the organization	Builds legitimacy and reputational resilience
Leadership legitimacy	Recognition of management competence and authority	Reduces disorganization during a crisis

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [6, 7, 17, 23]

This systematization demonstrates that trust in contemporary organizations is multilevel and is not limited to interpersonal interaction. Institutional trust and leadership legitimacy become particularly important during crises because they determine the organization's ability to maintain stable management processes and shape public perceptions of the crisis.

Crises of Trust in Organizational Management.

In the contemporary management environment, organizational crises are increasingly unlikely to remain confined to internal operational disruptions or localized managerial errors. The digitalization of communication, organizations' constant presence in the media environment, and the rapid circulation of information have substantially transformed the nature of crisis processes. A contemporary crisis consequently develops in two interconnected dimensions: an operational space associated with the organization's immediate functioning, and a symbolic-media space in which public perceptions of events, responsibility, and the legitimacy of management decisions are formed (Liang & Huang, 2023). Under these conditions, even a localized managerial error may escalate into a large-scale crisis of trust through intensive media coverage and reputational escalation.

The literature devotes considerable attention to reputational crises, which arise when an organization's positive image is undermined in the eyes of stakeholders (Sohn & Lariscy, 2013; Adi & Arijanti, 2025). A reputational crisis may be triggered by actual

misconduct, unsuccessful crisis communication, information manipulation, or public interpretations of organizational actions (Page et al., 2023). Contemporary reputational crises can rapidly extend beyond the initial problem and affect broader perceptions of organizational competence, ethics, and reliability. This produces a gradual erosion of trust whose consequences may persist much longer than the crisis event itself. Trust is lost not only because an error occurred but also because of a mismatch between stakeholder expectations and organizational behaviour during the crisis.

Another strand of contemporary research examines legitimacy crises, which occur when public recognition of an organization's right to exercise managerial influence and represent particular values or interests is lost (Kim, 2025). Unlike a purely reputational crisis, a legitimacy crisis affects the fundamental mechanisms of institutional trust and calls into question the organization's ability to function as an authoritative social actor (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022). Such crises become especially dangerous when management is excessively personalized and public trust is concentrated around an individual charismatic leader. If that leader loses authority or visible control over the crisis, both the organization's reputation and its internal management structure may be rapidly destabilized.

The mediatization of crisis processes is an important driver of this transformation, as mass

communication and digital platforms become active participants in constructing the crisis environment. Social networks, online media, and digital communities not only circulate information about a crisis but also generate emotionally charged interpretations that may intensify public anxiety, distrust, and reputational pressure on an organization (Xiao et al., 2025). Social media amplification is particularly significant: individual messages, symbolic images, or fragments of crisis communication spread virally and begin to function as independent media narratives. The organization consequently loses its monopoly over the interpretation of the crisis, while management decisions are evaluated not only for operational effectiveness but also for their conformity with public expectations and moral norms.

Under these conditions, crisis communication is evolving from a supplementary instrument of

information support into a central component of crisis management. The effectiveness of crisis-response decisions increasingly depends on an organization's capacity to maintain transparency, demonstrate accountability, and retain influence over the public narrative (Kumalasari et al., 2024). Contemporary crisis-management research emphasizes that successfully overcoming a crisis requires not only operational stabilization but also restoration of the organization's symbolic legitimacy among stakeholders (Badu et al., 2023). A contemporary crisis should therefore be understood both as a disruption of organizational functioning and as a struggle for control over the interpretation of events in public and media spaces. Table 2 summarizes the principal ways in which the crisis environment has changed with the digitalization of communication.

Table 2. Transformation of Contemporary Crises of Trust in a Mediatized Management Environment

Traditional model of a crisis of trust	Contemporary model of a crisis of trust
Confined within the organization	Unfolds simultaneously in organizational and media spaces
Slow dissemination of information	Immediate digital dissemination of information
Communication is controlled primarily by the organization	Interpretations of the crisis are shaped by media and social networks
Reputational consequences are delayed	Reputational escalation occurs almost simultaneously with the crisis
Primary attention is devoted to operational stabilization	Legitimacy, trust, and symbolic perceptions become critical
Crisis communication is a supporting element	Crisis communication becomes a central element of crisis management

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [15, 16, 20, 25]

Contemporary crises are complex: they unfold not only through material or operational disruptions but also within a space of symbolic interpretations and media evaluations.

Media Narratives as a Means of Interpreting Organizational Processes.

Recent transformations in the information environment have substantially expanded the use of media narratives in research on social, cultural, and managerial processes. In contemporary academic discourse, media narratives are increasingly regarded not merely as elements of popular culture or entertainment but as forms that represent complex behavioural models, power systems, managerial conflicts, and crisis situations. Narrative structures can represent interactions among individuals, organizations, and the social environment in a concentrated form, simplifying complex processes for subsequent interpretive analysis (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). Media narratives are therefore developing into a distinctive means of modelling organizational reality and revealing otherwise hidden mechanisms of power, trust, conflict, and managerial adaptation.

Storytelling occupies an important place in this approach and is understood in contemporary management as an instrument of communication, organizational learning, and support for organizational culture. Narratives do more than convey information: they shape shared values, behavioural patterns, and collective understandings of acceptable management

practices (Krupskiy & Stasiuk, 2023). Through stories, organizations communicate to employees and stakeholders their conceptions of effective leadership, acceptable forms of interaction, ethical standards, and mechanisms for responding to crises. Storytelling thus performs a functional rather than decorative managerial role by influencing organizational identity, sustaining loyalty, and stabilizing the internal communication environment.

Alongside the development of storytelling, graphic narratives and organizational comics are increasingly used as distinctive forms for representing organizational culture and management processes. They combine visual images, symbolic constructions, and storylines within a unified communication space (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). Graphic narratives can therefore depict not only the formal aspects of organizational activity but also the emotional, ethical, and behavioural dimensions of management. Organizational comics can model typical managerial situations, conflicts between employees and managers, crisis decisions, ethical dilemmas, and communication problems more vividly than conventional textual descriptions. They are consequently being used more actively in educational, managerial, and cross-cultural research as tools for interpreting organizational behaviour and crisis management.

An important feature of media narratives is their ability not only to reflect organizational processes but also to transform them into simplified and emotionally engaging models accessible to a broad public. Through

narrative modelling, complex management structures are reduced to comprehensible story conflicts, while organizational crises are personalized through particular leaders, symbolic images, or moral dilemmas (Gerde & Foster, 2007). Media narratives thereby reveal hidden tensions in the organizational environment, including conflicts between formal procedures and informal practices, institutional stability and charismatic leadership, and public expectations and actual managerial capabilities. They can therefore provide an effective analytical environment for studying crises of trust and management decisions under high uncertainty.

In a digitalized communication environment, the media representation of management has become especially important, as management processes increasingly become objects of popular cultural interpretation. Serialized narratives, graphic stories, animated media products, and digital platforms create distinctive models for perceiving leadership, crisis management, and organizational behaviour. In such media spaces, managerial conflicts often acquire greater visibility and emotional intensity than in conventional organizational research. Media narratives

can thus be used not only as illustrative material but also as a distinct instrument of narrative analysis capable of identifying patterns of crisis management, mechanisms of trust erosion, and models of leadership legitimization. A synthesis of approaches to storytelling, graphic narratives, and organizational comics makes it possible to identify their principal analytical functions in research on organizational processes (Figure 1). This provides a theoretical foundation for using media narratives to examine crisis management decisions and the loss of organizational trust.

Thus, despite the substantial body of research on crisis management, organizational trust, and crisis communication, contemporary academic discourse remains focused primarily on the operational, reputational, or informational dimensions of crisis management. Far less attention is devoted to crises of trust as a distinct form of organizational destabilization associated not only with managerial errors but also with the erosion of symbolic legitimacy, public authority, and collective confidence in an organization's ability to maintain stability under crisis conditions (Marks, 2023; Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022).

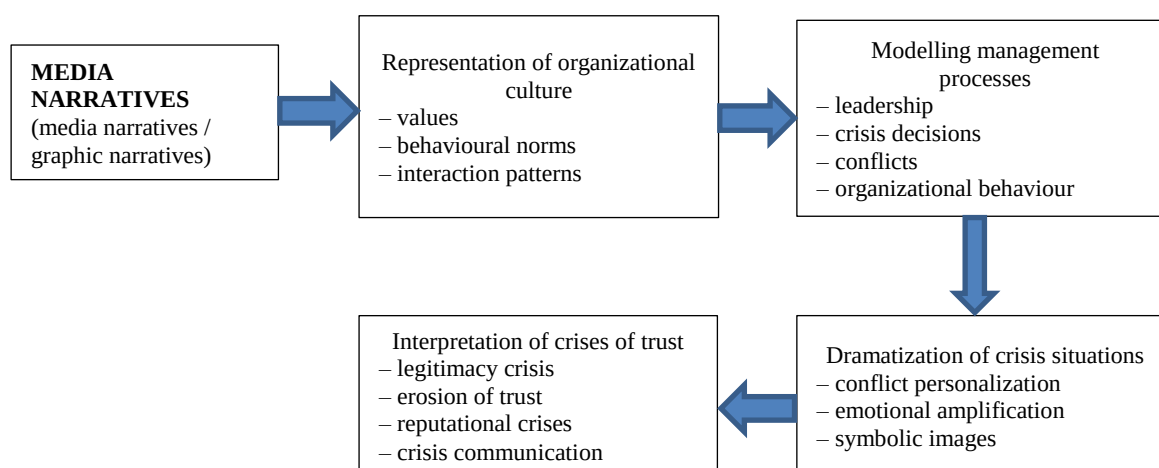


Figure 1. Analytical Functions of Media Narratives in Research on Organizational Processes

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [8, 11, 14]

The effects of symbolic leadership on organizational resilience and the mechanisms through which crises develop under excessive personalization of trust also remain insufficiently studied. In the contemporary information environment, public perceptions of an organization are increasingly shaped through the image of its leadership, public communication, and media interpretations of management decisions. A leader's loss of authority or the discrediting of particular management actions may therefore develop into a large-scale crisis of trust in the entire organizational system (Badu et al., 2023). Existing research nevertheless concentrates mainly on actual organizational cases, while the potential of media narratives for interpreting managerial conflicts and crisis decisions remains underexplored.

The representation of crisis management decisions in contemporary popular culture also requires attention. Media narratives, graphic stories, and serialized forms increasingly address leadership,

organizational resilience, crisis communication, and loss of trust, yet their use in management research remains fragmented (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). An interdisciplinary approach is therefore needed to integrate organizational behaviour, crisis management, narrative analysis, and the media representation of management processes.

Formulation of research objectives (task setting)

The aim of the article is to identify the narrative mechanisms representing institutional trust, leadership legitimacy, and crisis management decisions in the story arcs and conflicts of the anime series *My Hero Academia* and to determine how the personalization of trust around a symbolic leader affects the resilience of an organizational system during a crisis.

The following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1. How is institutional trust personalized in All Might as a symbolic leader constructed in the story arcs of *My Hero Academia*?

- RQ2. Through which narrative and communication mechanisms does the loss of a symbolic leader's legitimacy develop into a crisis of trust in the professional hero system?
- RQ3. Which crisis management decisions and communication practices are represented in the anime-series narrative as mechanisms for maintaining or restoring institutional trust?

Materials and methods

The study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach based on narrative analysis. The material comprises the first six seasons of the anime series *My Hero Academia* (Episodes 1–138, 2016–2023), produced by Bones (Nagasaki & Mukai, 2016–2023) and adapted from the manga by Kōhei Horikoshi. The professional hero system is treated as a media model of an institutionalized public-safety organization. Professional heroes perform not only operational functions of protecting the population but also communicative and symbolic functions associated with

sustaining public trust, legitimizing the established order, and creating a perception that threats remain under control.

The research corpus was formed through purposive sampling of narrative situations from the first six seasons. It includes episodes and story arcs representing the initial construction of All Might as the Symbol of Peace, the concentration of public trust around his public image, the gradual exposure of his physical vulnerability, his retirement, and the subsequent decline of trust in the professional hero system. The temporal boundaries extend from All Might's initial representation as a guarantor of social stability to the institutional and social consequences of his retirement, most clearly depicted in the Kamino Incident, Pro Hero, Paranormal Liberation War, and Dark Hero arcs (Nagasaki & Mukai, 2016–2023).

To specify the boundaries of the study and ensure transparency in sample formation, the structure of the narrative corpus is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Structure of the Narrative Corpus: Story Arcs, Crisis Conflicts, and Analytical Categories

Story arc or stage	Core conflict	Management and communication problem	Consequence for trust and legitimacy
Initial representation of All Might	Social stability depends on the image of one symbolic leader	Personalization of institutional trust and concentration of communication responsibility	Short-term stability accompanied by systemic dependence
Kamino Incident	Public exposure of All Might's physical vulnerability and retirement	Absence of a prepared mechanism of symbolic succession	Legitimacy crisis and weakened trust in the professional hero system
Pro Hero	Endeavor's attempt to assume the leading hero's position	Mismatch between formal leadership status and public recognition	Difficulty transferring symbolic legitimacy to a new leader
Paranormal Liberation War	Large-scale destruction, losses, and the system's inability to fully protect society	Controversial crisis decisions, information pressure, and unconvincing official communication	Distrust spreads from individual heroes to the entire institutional system
Dark Hero	Professional heroes' resignations, public discontent, and Deku's isolation	Search for a new model of crisis communication, responsibility, and stakeholder interaction	Gradual transition towards distributed leadership and collective trust restoration

Source: authors' own elaboration

The corpus structure demonstrates that the selected story arcs form an integrated narrative process in the development of a crisis of trust: from personalized symbolic stability and dependence on a symbolic leader, through a succession crisis and institutional destabilization, to the search for a new model of collective responsibility and restored legitimacy. Individual scenes were therefore analysed as components of integrated narrative conflicts rather than as isolated narrative fragments.

The sampling was conceptual and thematic rather than statistically representative; its sufficiency was determined by coverage of every stage of the examined crisis of trust and by the representation of the defined analytical categories.

Scenes were included if they met at least one of the following criteria:

- contained public or interpersonal statements about All Might as the Symbol of Peace;

- demonstrated the dependence of social stability on the authority of an individual hero;
- represented managerial or communication decisions made under the threat of losing trust;
- showed responses by the public, media, professional heroes, or other stakeholders to All Might's retirement;
- reflected changes in public perceptions of professional heroes and their ability to guarantee safety;
- contained attempts to restore legitimacy, redistribute responsibility, or establish a new leadership model.

The units of analysis were a story arc or a completed narrative episode depicting the development of a crisis conflict, managerial or communication decisions, stakeholder responses, and the consequences of those decisions for institutional trust and the legitimacy of the professional hero system. Individual scenes were analysed as components of the relevant

story arcs rather than as isolated textual fragments. This approach captured both individual manifestations of the crisis and its evolution from the personalization of trust to its gradual erosion and institutional destabilization.

The research procedure comprised three stages. First, key narrative events associated with the formation, maintenance, and erosion of All Might's symbolic authority were identified. Second, the selected scenes were coded according to organizational trust, symbolic leadership, crisis communication, and organizational legitimacy. Third, causal relationships were established among the characters' communication and management decisions, stakeholder responses, and changes in perceptions of the professional hero system.

An analytical framework was developed to ensure consistency in the narrative analysis. It represents the relationships among the source of a crisis situation, the

type of trust, managerial and communication decisions, stakeholder responses, and consequences for the legitimacy of the organizational system. The framework also incorporates mechanisms for restoring trust represented in *My Hero Academia* (Figure 2).

As shown in Figure 2, each selected narrative situation was analysed by reconstructing the development of the crisis of trust. The source of the crisis and the object and type of trust affected were identified first. The management decision, communication strategy, and responses of key stakeholders were then examined. Finally, the consequences for the legitimacy of the professional hero system and the represented mechanisms of trust restoration were evaluated. Feedback in the framework indicates that crisis outcomes and efforts to restore legitimacy influence subsequent managerial and communication decisions.

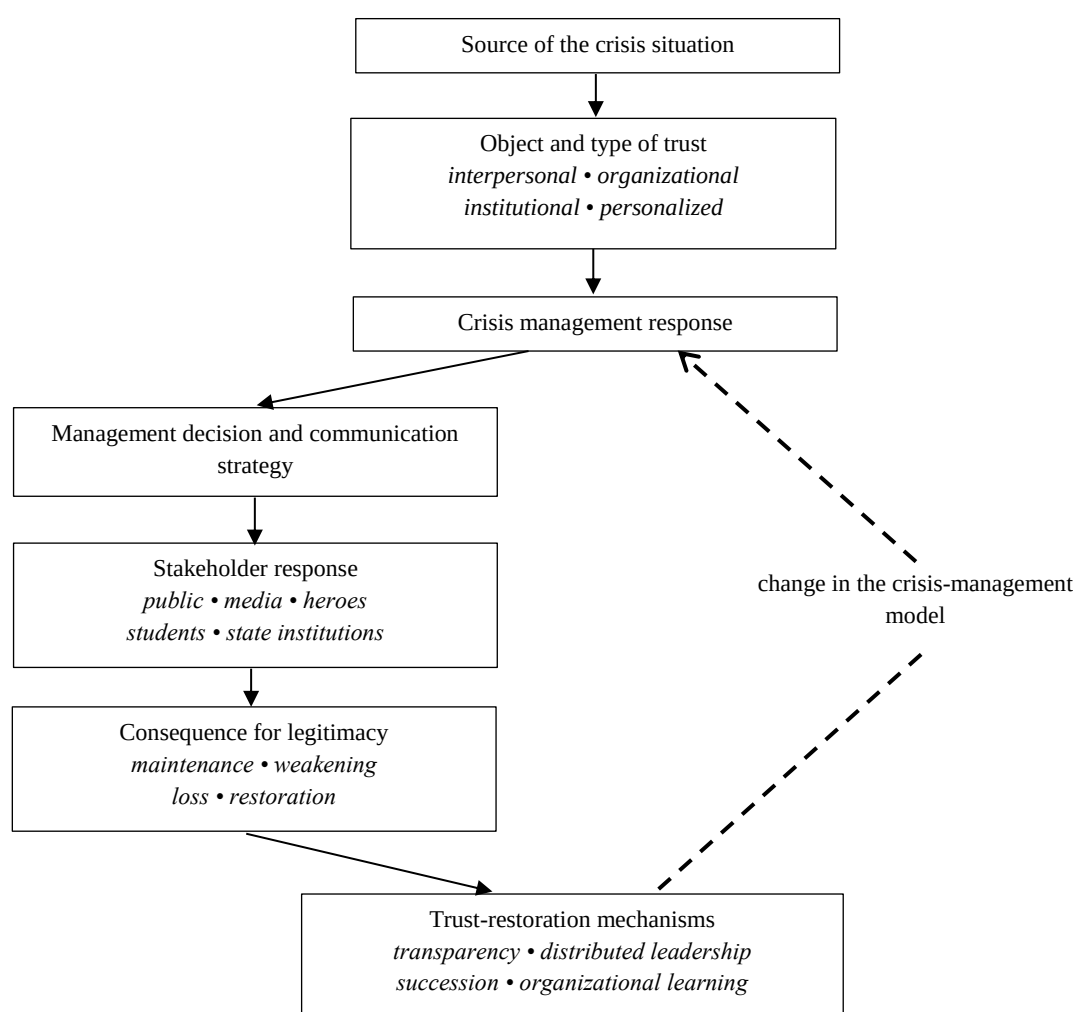


Figure 2. Analytical Framework for the Narrative Analysis of a Trust Crisis in *My Hero Academia*
Source: authors' own elaboration

The analytical framework established the following coding categories:

1. Source of the crisis situation: an event or decision that threatens trust in and the legitimacy of the system.
2. Object of trust: an individual leader, a professional group, or the system of hero institutions.

3. Type of trust: interpersonal, organizational, institutional, or personalized symbolic trust.

4. Management decision: action or inaction intended to overcome the crisis, ensure succession, or maintain stability.

5. Communication strategy: withholding information, controlling a public image, providing

explanations, acknowledging responsibility, or constructing a new crisis narrative.

6. Stakeholder response: responses by the public, media, professional heroes, students, state institutions, and other participants in the system.

7. Consequence for legitimacy: the maintenance, weakening, loss, or gradual restoration of public recognition of the system.

8. Trust-restoration mechanism: transparency, distributed leadership, institutional continuity, succession, or organizational learning.

The results were interpreted by comparing the identified narrative patterns with research on organizational trust, crisis communication, charismatic and distributed leadership, and organizational resilience. Theoretical generalization was used to determine correspondence between narrative constructions and crisis-management models; structural-logical analysis reconstructed the development of the crisis of trust; and tabular modelling systematized crisis events, management decisions, stakeholder responses, and consequences for organizational legitimacy.

The analysis does not evaluate the artistic quality of the anime series or establish actual audience responses. Instead, it examines how public trust, symbolic leadership, crisis communication, and institutional legitimacy are constructed within the narrative. Public responses discussed in the study are therefore treated as elements of the narrative world rather than empirical evidence concerning the audience of *My Hero Academia*.

Presentation of main results and their justification

In contemporary crisis environments, management decisions are increasingly made under high

uncertainty, information instability, and elevated reputational risk. Previous research on management decision-making models and tools has emphasized that managerial effectiveness largely depends on an organization's ability to adapt to dynamic external change, maintain communication stability, and respond rapidly to crisis challenges (Naumenko et al., 2025). Contemporary crises, however, are rarely exclusively operational, because their development is strongly influenced by trust in the organization, its leadership, and its public image.

The erosion of trust gradually becomes a complex process that destabilizes the management system, affecting both organizational functions and symbolic perceptions of legitimacy, competence, and control over the crisis (Marks, 2023). The personalization of leadership, reputational vulnerability, and the dependence of organizational resilience on leaders' media image therefore become especially important. Crisis processes consequently move into the sphere of public interpretation, where management decisions are evaluated both for practical effectiveness and for symbolic conformity with public expectations (Liang & Huang, 2023).

Application of the analytical framework established that the crisis of trust in *My Hero Academia* develops as a sequential, multilevel process. Public trust is initially concentrated around All Might's image as the Symbol of Peace. His loss of the ability to perform as a professional hero produces a crisis of symbolic succession that gradually spreads across the professional hero system. Growing threats, contradictory crisis communication, and negative stakeholder responses subsequently weaken the system's institutional legitimacy. Figure 3 summarizes this sequence.

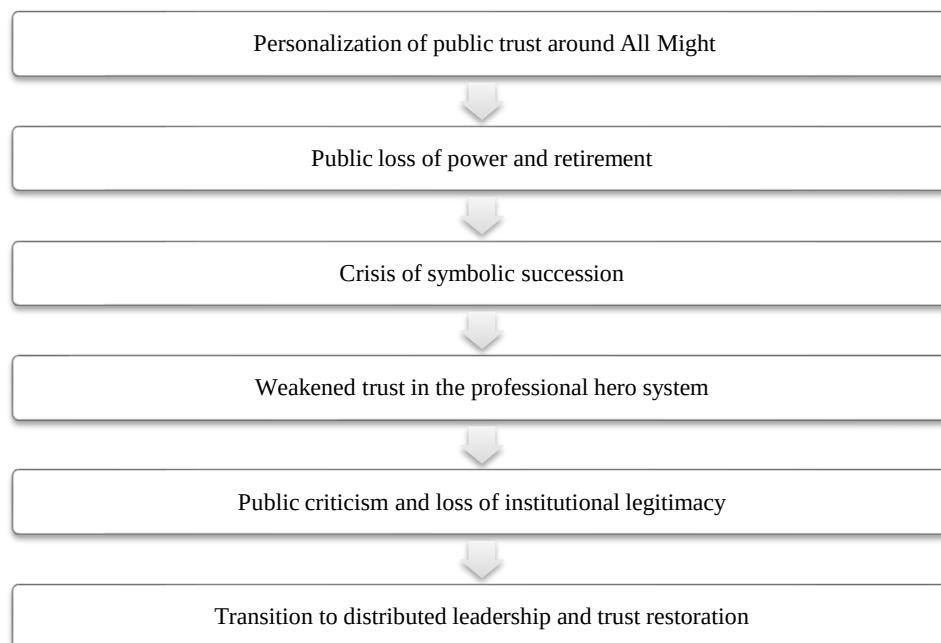


Figure 3. Sequence in the Development of the Crisis of Trust in the Narrative of *My Hero Academia*
Source: authors' own elaboration

This model determines the presentation of the results. The analysis begins with All Might's formation as a personalized bearer of institutional trust, then considers the consequences of his public loss of symbolic status, the spread of distrust across the professional hero system, and the narrative mechanisms through which organizational legitimacy is restored.

The Construction of All Might as the Symbol of Peace.

In the early stages of the narrative, All Might is represented not merely as the strongest professional hero but as the central symbol of social order. His image combines the physical capacity to counter threats, moral integrity, public confidence, and controlled communication. Public safety in My Hero Academia is therefore associated less with the effectiveness of the professional hero system as a whole than with the presence of a single public figure.

All Might is constructed as the Symbol of Peace through the repeated use of several communication markers: a confident smile, demonstrative calm, a publicly expressed readiness to protect civilians, and no visible doubt about victory. His smile performs not only an emotional but also a strategic communication function. It signals that the situation remains under control and the threat will be neutralized. The hero's public image thus becomes an instrument for reducing social anxiety.

The narrative consistently distinguishes All Might's actual physical condition from his public representation. Following a severe injury, he can no longer maintain his heroic form continuously, yet conceals this fact from the public. His image develops a dual structure: an internally vulnerable individual and an outwardly unwavering social symbol. This discrepancy is not presented as ordinary personal concealment but functions as an informal crisis-communication strategy intended to preserve public confidence in the system's stability.

In the short term, this strategy is effective. All Might's public presence deters crime, sustains public trust, and creates a perception that social order is predictable. At the institutional level, however, it creates substantial vulnerability: the system does not disclose its limited resources, prepare the public for leadership change, or establish an alternative symbolic centre. Social stability consequently becomes dependent on one person's continuous reproduction of an image of absolute strength.

Trust in All Might gradually extends beyond interpersonal or professional recognition. He becomes a personalized bearer of institutional legitimacy: trust in him effectively substitutes for trust in the professional hero system. Other heroes are perceived as participants in that system, but All Might provides the ultimate guarantee of safety. The narrative therefore represents a formally collective institution whose public legitimacy is concentrated around one charismatic leader.

Stakeholder responses reveal this personalization of trust. For civilians, All Might guarantees physical safety; for professional heroes, he is a normative model

of heroic conduct; for U.A. students, a model of professional identity; and for villains, the principal deterrent. His symbolic authority thus affects both internal and external participants in the system. This reinforces stability while increasing the potential consequences of losing his public status.

The identified model reveals the contradictory nature of symbolic leadership. A personalized image can rapidly mobilize public support and sustain confidence that threats remain controllable. Yet prolonged identification of the system with one leader weakens institutional succession mechanisms and complicates the redistribution of trust. All Might's construction as the Symbol of Peace therefore becomes both a foundation of stability and the initial source of a future legitimacy crisis.

This model remains stable only while All Might can sustain a public image of absolute strength. The exposure of his physical vulnerability and declining ability to perform heroic functions transform personalized trust from a source of stability into a systemic risk. This contradiction becomes most visible during the confrontation at Kamino, where All Might's personal victory simultaneously ends his professional career and initiates a crisis of symbolic succession.

Personalization of Institutional Trust and the Risks of Dependence on a Charismatic Leader.

All Might's constructed image gradually extends beyond an individual heroic identity and becomes the primary symbol of the professional hero system's legitimacy. Public trust in the institution is consequently identified increasingly with trust in one public figure, providing a model of personalized institutional trust.

A characteristic feature of contemporary crises of trust is the gradual shift of public and organizational trust from institutional mechanisms towards individual public figures who personify stability, competence, and control over a crisis. The organization is then perceived not only as a system of procedures, rules, and managerial functions but also as an extension of a particular leader's symbolic image. A model of personalized trust emerges in which organizational legitimacy and reputational resilience depend substantially on individual public authority (House & Shamir, 1993).

Charismatic leadership is traditionally understood as a leader's capacity to generate strong emotional support, collective mobilization, and confidence in the appropriateness of joint action (Willner & Willner, 1965). During crises, this model may be highly effective because it facilitates rapid decisions, sustains organizational cohesion, and focuses stakeholder attention on a single centre of management (Jamal & Abu Bakar, 2015). Under uncertainty, charismatic leadership can therefore support organizational stability and reduce public anxiety.

Excessive concentration of trust around one leader nevertheless creates substantial risks to organizational resilience. Institutional coordination mechanisms gradually weaken, while managerial effectiveness becomes associated primarily with the leader's personal qualities. The organization becomes

dependent on individual symbolic authority and increasingly vulnerable if the leader loses public legitimacy or the capacity to project control (Peden, 2024). A crisis of trust in the leader may consequently become a legitimacy crisis for the entire organizational system.

This model becomes especially dangerous during a succession crisis, when an organization is insufficiently prepared to lose a key leader. Weber emphasized the inherent difficulty of transferring

charismatic legitimacy because its authority is based on the exceptional qualities of a particular person rather than formal procedures (Akdeniz, 2020). Even highly effective systems may therefore lose stability when a leader's symbolic status declines and mechanisms for distributing responsibility and institutional support remain underdeveloped.

Table 4 systematizes the effects of charismatic leadership on organizational resilience during a crisis.

Table 4. Effects of Charismatic Leadership on Organizational Resilience during a Crisis

Characteristic of charismatic leadership	Positive organizational effect	Potential risk to organizational resilience
High level of public trust in the leader	Greater employee mobilization and stakeholder support	Organizational dependence on one individual
Leader's symbolic authority	Stronger sense of stability and control over the crisis	Collapse of trust in the system if the leader loses authority
Rapid decision-making	Prompt response under crisis conditions	Weakening of collective management mechanisms
Personalization of organizational success	Strong public organizational image	Overcentralized trust and a succession crisis
Emotional support from the leader	Greater organizational cohesion	Reduced role of institutional procedures and formal coordination

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [2, 10, 12, 24]

The systematization demonstrates that charismatic leadership has a dual effect on organizational resilience. In the short term, it can enhance organizational mobilization and sustain stability during a crisis. Excessive personalization of trust, however, gradually makes the system dependent on the symbolic authority of an individual leader and increases the risk of large-scale destabilization if that leader loses public legitimacy.

This logic is represented particularly clearly in contemporary narratives, where crisis processes frequently centre on the leader as the symbolic core of organizational stability. In *My Hero Academia*, the professional hero system operates largely through public trust in All Might as the Symbol of Peace. His public image performs more than motivational or communicative functions: it becomes a mechanism for sustaining social stability and containing crisis processes. The system consequently develops excessive dependence on one leader's symbolic authority, while institutional mechanisms for distributing responsibility and ensuring succession remain underdeveloped.

The personalization of trust around All Might thus gives the professional hero system short-term symbolic stability but weakens its ability to function independently of him. The system can perform operational tasks but lacks a publicly comprehensible and institutionally embedded model of symbolic succession. All Might's physical vulnerability therefore becomes a systemic risk exposed during the confrontation at Kamino, which transforms concealed dependence on a charismatic leader into an overt crisis of trust and legitimacy.

All Might's Public Loss of Power and the Crisis of Symbolic Succession.

A system centred on personalized symbolic leadership remains stable only while the leader can project strength, competence, and control. The confrontation between All Might and All For One at Kamino is the turning point in *My Hero Academia*. It simultaneously demonstrates the Symbol of Peace's capacity to neutralize a central threat and exposes the physical vulnerability previously concealed from the public.

The public nature of the confrontation is particularly significant. Because the battle is broadcast by the media, the public witnesses not only the physical conflict but also the collapse of All Might's familiar image. His weakened form becomes visible to a mass audience, creating a gap between the former representation of an invincible hero and the actual limits of his abilities. The crisis therefore unfolds both operationally, through resistance to All For One, and within a symbolic-communication space where the durability of society's principal guarantee of security is questioned.

All Might's final victory temporarily restores public confidence. His victorious gesture and ability to end the confrontation sustain the established heroic narrative. The victory is nevertheless paradoxical: it confirms his symbolic status while simultaneously marking the end of his professional activity. The same event thus performs two opposing communication functions by demonstrating the system's strength and revealing the loss of its main symbolic resource.

The decisive crisis occurs when All Might publicly loses the capacity to project absolute control. The exposure of his physical vulnerability weakens not only an individual hero but also the foundations of public trust in the entire professional hero system. This is followed by rising panic, intensified criminal activity, criticism of hero institutions, and doubts about

the system's capacity to protect society. The narrative thereby illustrates an overcentralization of trust that makes organizational resilience critically dependent on one person's symbolic status.

All Might's public message after the victory also carries two meanings. A general audience may interpret it as a warning to future opponents, whereas within the narrative it is addressed to Izuku Midoriya as the successor to One For All. This communicative duality exposes the divide between private and public succession. Power has been transferred personally, but society receives no comprehensible explanation of who or what will now guarantee stability.

All Might's retirement consequently produces a crisis of symbolic succession. The professional hero system continues to operate formally, and Endeavor eventually becomes the number-one hero. Yet a change in professional ranking does not automatically transfer symbolic legitimacy. Endeavor possesses considerable operational capacity but not the level of public trust, emotional support, and moral authority associated with All Might.

The narrative therefore distinguishes functional from symbolic succession. Functional succession transfers professional duties and formal status to the strongest active hero. Symbolic succession requires public recognition, emotional trust, and the new leader's capacity to embody shared values. Functional succession occurs after All Might's retirement, while symbolic succession remains incomplete.

The professional hero system in *My Hero Academia* functions substantially through public trust in All Might as the Symbol of Peace. His public image is not merely motivational or communicative but a mechanism for sustaining social stability and containing crises. The system consequently becomes excessively dependent on one leader's symbolic authority, while institutional arrangements for distributing responsibility and ensuring succession remain underdeveloped.

All Might's public inability to maintain an image of absolute control becomes the critical moment. It weakens both the individual hero and public trust in the professional hero system. Growing panic, criminal activity, criticism of hero institutions, and doubts about public safety reveal the classic overcentralization of trust, in which organizational resilience depends critically on one person's symbolic status.

All Might's retirement also exposes the weak institutionalization of his symbolic functions. The professional hero system was prepared for a formal change in ranking but not for the loss of a public symbol. It had established neither a collective image of responsibility, a clear public model of succession, nor a communication strategy explaining how safety would be maintained after All Might's departure. The absence of one leader is therefore perceived as the weakening of the entire system.

The confrontation at Kamino thus marks the transition from concealed vulnerability to an overt legitimacy crisis. Victory over All For One removes the immediate threat but not the systemic risk caused by excessive personalization of trust. All Might's

publicly revealed loss of professional capacity creates a symbolic vacuum that a formal successor cannot automatically fill. This vacuum enables distrust to spread across the professional hero system.

The crisis of symbolic succession does not immediately destroy the professional hero system, but it changes the conditions under which the system operates. After All Might's retirement, every new threat, managerial failure, or controversial public message is evaluated without the familiar symbolic guarantor of safety. The loss of trust therefore develops from a consequence of one leader's personal crisis into an independent destabilizing factor affecting the entire system.

Loss of Trust as a Destabilizing Factor in the Professional Hero System.

All Might's retirement does not immediately destroy the professional hero system, but it deprives the system of its principal symbolic centre. The departure of the Symbol of Peace changes perceptions of public safety. Stability had been associated with the guaranteed presence of the strongest hero; afterwards, the public increasingly evaluates the system through its vulnerability. Rising villain activity, public anxiety, and doubts about other heroes' capacity to provide comparable protection transform All Might's personal loss of professional capacity into an institutional problem.

Loss of organizational trust is not only a consequence of a crisis but also an independent driver of further destabilization. A crisis may initially involve a specific managerial error, information failure, ineffective communication, or unmet stakeholder expectations. Once trust is lost, however, organizational decisions are evaluated through doubts about managerial competence, accountability, and integrity (Marks, 2023). Even rational or technically justified actions may then be perceived as inadequate, delayed, or concealing deeper systemic problems.

The causal logic of such a crisis involves a gradual transition from a localized trust deficit to managerial disorganization. Distrust in an individual decision or leadership action spreads to procedures, communication channels, and managerial intentions in general. Employees, clients, and other stakeholders become less willing to support organizational decisions, complicating coordination during a crisis (Badu et al., 2023). Loss of trust therefore damages not only organizational reputation but also practical management mechanisms by reducing the predictability of participants' responses.

The erosion of trust becomes especially dangerous when it weakens the legitimacy of the management system. Legitimacy denotes recognition of the organization's and its leadership's right to make decisions, allocate resources, set priorities, and request support from employees or external stakeholders. When legitimacy declines, the organization loses its capacity to act as an authoritative centre of coordination. Managerial directives may remain formally valid, yet their practical force diminishes as participants question their appropriateness, fairness, or effectiveness (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022).

In the contemporary media environment, loss of trust is frequently accompanied by the erosion of organizational symbolic authority. Stakeholders perceive an organization not only as a set of processes, structures, and resources but also as an embodiment of reliability, professionalism, ethics, stability, or social responsibility. When this image collapses, the crisis moves from a functional to a symbolic level. The organization may retain some operational capacity while losing public confidence in its ability to act appropriately and responsibly (Liang & Huang, 2023). Crises of trust are therefore particularly dangerous because they undermine both current managerial effectiveness and the fundamental conditions under which an organization is regarded as a legitimate actor.

From a management perspective, loss of trust is a multilevel process encompassing reputational, communication, procedural, and institutional dimensions. Doubts first arise about the organization's

positive image; confidence in official explanations then weakens; the quality of management decisions is questioned; and finally the organization's capacity to perform its core functions is doubted. In *My Hero Academia*, All Might's retirement first creates doubts about whether other heroes can replace the Symbol of Peace. Official messages and public appearances then become less convincing, while destruction, increased crime, and failures to protect civilians call the professional system's effectiveness into question. Ultimately, distrust extends beyond individual heroes or decisions to the institutional model of public-safety provision itself.

The narrative thus represents loss of trust as a cumulative process in which weakened symbolic leadership enables reputational, communicative, procedural, and ultimately institutional destabilization. Figure 4 summarizes this causal sequence.

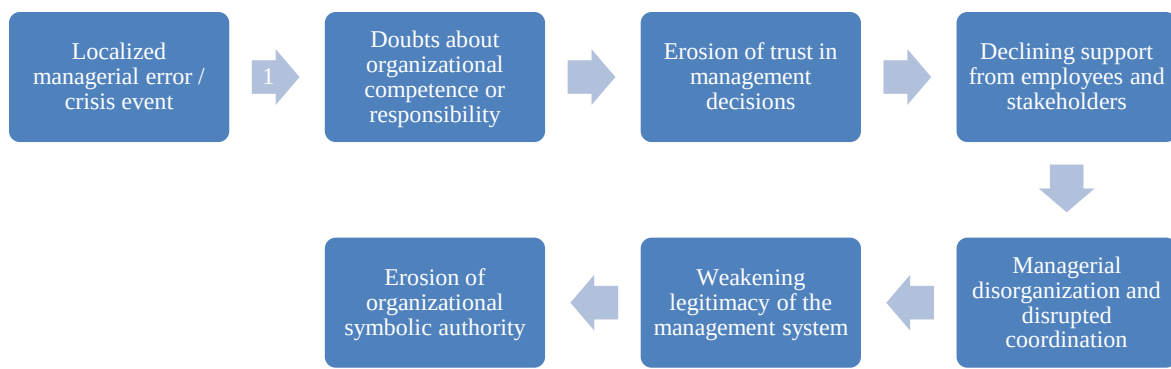


Figure 4. Causal Logic of Management-System Destabilization Resulting from Loss of Trust

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [4, 6, 16, 17]

The framework demonstrates that loss of trust is not a secondary reputational effect that emerges after a crisis. It may become the central mechanism deepening the crisis by changing interactions among the organization, its leadership, and stakeholders. Crisis management decisions under conditions of distrust must therefore address not only a particular error but also the restoration of managerial legitimacy, communication transparency, and the organization's symbolic capacity to act as a responsible and reliable actor.

All Might's retirement is not the sole cause of the subsequent crisis. It is a critical event that reveals accumulated institutional weaknesses: dependence on one symbolic leader, inadequate succession preparation, unevenly distributed responsibility, and limited capacity to sustain public trust during large-scale disruption. Subsequent crises unfold in a low-trust environment in which every managerial or communication failure intensifies doubts about the legitimacy of the system as a whole.

This sequence demonstrates that *My Hero Academia* not only portrays a particular crisis of symbolic leadership but also models a broader crisis environment in which management decisions, public communication, and stakeholder responses reinforce one another. The narrative can therefore be treated as

an analytical model of the development of a crisis of trust and the loss of institutional legitimacy.

My Hero Academia as a Model of a Crisis Communication and Management Environment.

Contemporary media narratives increasingly represent not only individual conflicts or entertainment plots but also complex models of social interaction, organizational behaviour, and crisis management. By combining visual imagery, emotional dramatization, and concentrated plot structures, they model uncertainty, conflicts of interest, loss of trust, and managerial destabilization more vividly than abstract theoretical constructs (Hudoshnyk & Krupskiy, 2023). Media narratives can therefore serve not merely as illustrations but as analytical environments that reveal hidden mechanisms of crisis management and the symbolic legitimation of authority.

The analysis shows that *My Hero Academia* represents both individual conflicts between heroes and villains and a complex model of organizational behaviour, public communication, and crisis management. Its visual imagery, emotional dramatization, and sequential plot structure trace the crisis from the personalization of trust around All Might to the loss of legitimacy across the professional hero system. The narrative thus functions as an analytical environment revealing mechanisms of

symbolic legitimization, crisis communication, and institutional destabilization.

A key characteristic of narratives is narrative compression: the capacity to concentrate complex multilevel processes within relatively compact plot structures. In actual organizations, crises of trust may develop over years and involve numerous economic, political, communicative, and social factors. A narrative presents these processes in a simplified yet structurally coherent form, making causal relationships among management decisions, public responses, and organizational destabilization visible. This enables concentrated analysis without losing the logic of the managerial conflict.

The dramatization of organizational conflict is equally important because it makes crisis processes emotionally expressive and socially visible. Conflict among the organization, its leaders, and society assumes a personalized form in which management decisions are directly connected with moral responsibility, trust, and the legitimacy of authority. This reveals dimensions often obscured in formal management models: emotional perceptions of leadership, symbolic images, collective anxiety, public expectations, and moral dilemmas (Gerde & Foster, 2007). Narratives therefore support an integrated analysis of both formal managerial effectiveness and its social and symbolic perception.

Ethical dilemmas are particularly significant in the study of crisis management decisions because narratives can represent them more vividly than conventional case models. During crises, leaders often decide amid conflicts among security, transparency, public stability, and moral responsibility. Media narratives demonstrate the operational consequences of such decisions as well as their effects on public trust,

collective psychological conditions, and organizational symbolic legitimacy. They can therefore illuminate situations in which a formally correct decision does not preserve trust in the management system.

The analytical value of media narratives also lies in their focus on public perceptions of management. In the digital environment, managerial effectiveness increasingly depends on how decisions are interpreted by society, media, and social groups (Page et al., 2023). Narratives foreground collective perceptions of leadership competence, the fairness of managerial action, and organizational capacity to maintain stability. They facilitate analysis of both the functional dimensions of crisis management and the symbolic construction of trust or distrust, particularly where stability depends on one leader's symbolic authority.

In My Hero Academia, the professional hero system functions as a model of public safety based on collective trust in hero institutions. Its actual stability, however, depends substantially on All Might's public image as the Symbol of Peace. Crisis processes therefore concern not only physical threats or crime but also the gradual erosion of public confidence in the system's capacity to retain control.

The crisis of trust is represented simultaneously at institutional, communicative, and symbolic levels. All Might's public loss of the capacity to sustain an image of absolute strength weakens both his position and public perceptions of the professional hero system. Crisis management under conditions of distrust therefore depends on actual organizational effectiveness and on the capacity to sustain symbolic public confidence in systemic stability. Table 5 summarizes the narrative's principal analytical functions.

Table 5. Analytical Functions of My Hero Academia in Representing a Crisis of Trust

Analytical function	Manifestation in My Hero Academia	Significance for analysing a crisis of trust
Narrative compression	Concentration of long-term institutional dependence around All Might	Reveals the causal logic of the crisis
Conflict dramatization	Public confrontation between All Might and All For One	Makes systemic vulnerability visible
Leadership personalization	Identification of public safety with the Symbol of Peace	Reveals the risk of overcentralized trust
Representation of ethical dilemmas	Concealment of All Might's vulnerability to maintain stability	Shows the conflict between transparency and public safety
Formation of public perceptions	Media and public responses to the hero's retirement	Explains the transition from a personal to an institutional crisis
Visualization of crisis consequences	Growing fear, criticism of heroes, and social disorganization	Demonstrates the erosion of institutional legitimacy

Source: authors' own elaboration

The systematization demonstrates the considerable analytical potential of narratives for studying crisis-management processes. Narratives represent crises in simplified and visually expressive forms while revealing hidden mechanisms of trust erosion, management-system destabilization, and the collapse of organizational symbolic legitimacy. They may therefore serve as effective tools for interpreting crisis management in contemporary digital and media environments.

My Hero Academia consequently models a crisis of trust as a multilevel communication and management process in which a leader's symbolic vulnerability gradually becomes institutional destabilization. The narrative also represents the search for new mechanisms to distribute responsibility, sustain legitimacy, and restore public trust.

Managerial and Communication Mechanisms for Restoring Trust after a Crisis.

The analysis shows that restoring trust in the professional hero system is not associated with creating another individual Symbol of Peace. The narrative instead develops a model of collective responsibility in which social stability is supported by professional heroes, U.A. students, educational institutions, and civilians. Its principal elements are transparency, crisis communication, distributed leadership, institutional continuity, organizational learning, and a reconsideration of succession.

Restoring trust after a crisis is more difficult than initially establishing it because stakeholders evaluate not only individual decisions but also the organization's overall capacity to maintain stability, responsibility, and control. Post-crisis management cannot therefore be limited to eliminating operational consequences. It must restore organizational legitimacy, communication transparency, and public confidence in the organization's capacity to act effectively under uncertainty (Badu et al., 2023).

Management transparency is a key trust-restoration mechanism and entails open communication, accessible explanations of decisions, and willingness to acknowledge organizational mistakes. Concealing information or minimizing a crisis often intensifies distrust and reputational escalation in digital environments (Kumalasari et al., 2024). Open communication can instead reduce public anxiety and sustain a sense of control. In *My Hero Academia*, transparency becomes particularly important after the disclosure of Endeavor's past and the consequences of the Paranormal Liberation War. The joint press conference by Endeavor, Hawks, and Best Jeanist attempts to move from controlling a positive heroic image to openly acknowledging responsibility and public criticism. The narrative nevertheless shows that disclosure alone cannot immediately restore trust without convincing action.

Crisis communication is also central to restoring trust. Its effectiveness depends not only on speed but on the organization's capacity to construct a coherent, logical, and comprehensible public narrative. Stakeholders evaluate both messages and consistency between leaders' words and actions (Page et al., 2023). Crisis communication must therefore perform informational, coordinative, and symbolic functions. Ochaco Uraraka's appeal to civilians opposing Midoriya's return to U.A. provides an important example. Unlike the formal communication of professional heroes, her address is based on empathy, recognition of public fear, and a reinterpretation of the hero not as an infallible symbol but as a person who also needs support. This shifts communication from one-way information provision towards emotional stakeholder engagement.

Reducing systemic dependence on an individual charismatic leader is essential to long-term organizational resilience. Excessive personalization of trust increases vulnerability to legitimacy and succession crises. Crisis management therefore increasingly emphasizes distributed leadership, in

which responsibility, communication, and stability are shared across multiple management levels (Bolden, 2011). After All Might's retirement, no character fully inherits his symbolic status. Governability is restored through the distribution of functions among Endeavor, Hawks, Best Jeanist, U.A. students, and other participants. Collective capacity gradually replaces personalized trust.

Institutional continuity is another important mechanism of post-crisis stability and involves maintaining key procedures, management roles, and coordination despite the loss of individual leaders or reputational disruption. It sustains predictability and stakeholder confidence that the system can function independently of personnel changes (Habermas, 1973). In the narrative, U.A. performs this function by transforming from an educational institution into a protected space for civilians and a centre of crisis coordination. Despite weakened trust in professional heroes, U.A.'s continued functioning preserves a basic sense of order and demonstrates institutional adaptability.

Organizational learning also supports trust restoration by transforming crisis experience into adaptation and improved management practice. Treating a crisis as a temporary threat risks recurrence; analysing destabilization, reconsidering communication, and revising coordination can create a more resilient management model (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Trust restoration should be understood not as a return to the pre-crisis state but as the gradual construction of a new configuration of organizational legitimacy and stakeholder interaction. The narrative increasingly recognizes that maintaining safety requires the participation of heroes, educational institutions, the public, and other social groups.

Table 6 systematizes the managerial significance of the principal trust-restoration mechanisms and their effects on organizational resilience.

The systematization demonstrates that restoring trust after a crisis requires an integrated combination of communicative, institutional, and managerial mechanisms. Effective post-crisis management should stabilize current processes while reducing dependence on individual leaders' symbolic authority, strengthening institutional resilience, and developing the system's capacity for long-term adaptation under uncertainty.

Discussion.

The narrative analysis confirms that loss of organizational trust is not limited to reputational damage; it affects the legitimacy of management decisions, stakeholder relationships, and the system's overall capacity to maintain stability. This supports Marks's (2023) argument that a crisis of trust may be both a consequence of a crisis event and an independent factor that deepens it. In *My Hero Academia*, this interdependence is reflected in the progression from All Might's physical vulnerability to a crisis of symbolic succession and ultimately to distrust in the entire professional hero system.

Table 6. Managerial and Communication Mechanisms for Restoring Trust after a Crisis

Management mechanism	Core content	Effect on organizational resilience	Manifestation in <i>My Hero Academia</i>
Management transparency	Open information and acknowledgement of problems	Reduced distrust and reputational escalation	Endeavor publicly acknowledges responsibility and systemic problems
Crisis communication	Construction of a coherent public narrative	Maintenance of managerial legitimacy	Ochaco Uraraka's appeal to civilians
Distributed leadership	Redistribution of responsibility across management levels	Reduced dependence on one individual	Responsibility shared by professional heroes and students
Institutional continuity	Maintenance of procedures and coordination	Systemic stability under crisis conditions	U.A. becomes a centre of protection and coordination
Organizational learning	Analysis of crisis experience and adaptation of practice	Greater organizational resilience	Reconsideration of society's dependence on one symbol
Succession planning	Mechanisms for transferring management functions	Reduced risk of a legitimacy crisis	Transfer of One For All and limits of purely personal succession

Source: elaborated by the authors based on [2, 3, 5, 10]

The findings also extend research on stakeholder perceptions of organizational crises (Contreras-Pacheco et al., 2022). The public evaluates the system not only by the actual results achieved by heroes but also by whether their behaviour meets established social expectations. After All Might's retirement, even effective actions by other heroes do not automatically restore trust because they occur under already weakened legitimacy. Perceptions of crisis decisions therefore depend both on operational effectiveness and on stakeholders' pre-existing attitudes towards the decision-maker.

The distinction between functional and symbolic succession is particularly important. The system can formally designate a new number-one hero after All Might's retirement, but Endeavor's professional status does not automatically transfer public trust. This confirms charismatic-leadership theory concerning the difficulty of institutionalizing and transferring personalized legitimacy (House & Shamir, 1993; Akdeniz, 2020). Symbolic authority cannot be transferred solely through formal appointment, ranking, or redistribution of duties because it develops through sustained communication between a leader and stakeholders.

The findings also demonstrate the dual effect of charismatic leadership. Initially, trust personalized around All Might reduces public anxiety, mobilizes professional heroes, and deters villains, consistent with Jamal and Abu Bakar's (2015) findings on charismatic leaders' capacity to sustain collective confidence during crises. Long-term dependence on one symbolic figure, however, weakens collective responsibility and creates a succession crisis. Characteristics supporting short-term resilience may thus become sources of long-term vulnerability when they are not institutionally embedded.

The analysis also confirms the importance of mediatization in crises of trust. The public confrontation between All Might and All For One transforms the hero's physical vulnerability into a collectively experienced event. Media within the narrative do more than transmit information: they frame public perception so that victory over an

immediate threat is simultaneously interpreted as the end of an era of stability. This supports Liang and Huang's (2023) conclusions regarding media interpretations, attribution of responsibility, and evaluations of organizational legitimacy during crises.

The findings extend this argument by showing that mediatization can make previously concealed institutional dependence visible as well as intensify negative perceptions. Before Kamino, All Might's physical vulnerability exists but does not directly shape public perceptions because it remains hidden. Its public exposure transforms a personal problem into evidence of systemic instability. Mediatization thus functions as a mechanism through which latent organizational vulnerability becomes an overt legitimacy crisis.

The crisis-communication findings broadly support Badu et al. (2023) and Kumalasari et al. (2024) regarding transparency, message consistency, and alignment between words and actions. *My Hero Academia* nevertheless shows that formal disclosure and acknowledgement of responsibility are insufficient to restore trust immediately. The heroes' press conference provides informational openness but does not eliminate public fear and dissatisfaction. Ochaco Uraraka's appeal instead demonstrates empathetic communication that recognizes the audience's emotional condition and enables participation in overcoming the crisis.

This distinguishes informational and relational dimensions of crisis communication. The informational dimension explains events, acknowledges problems, and reports managerial action. The relational dimension restores mutual recognition, empathy, and willingness to cooperate between an organization and its stakeholders. Sustainable trust restoration begins only when communication ceases to be one-way information provision and becomes interaction that recognizes the public as an active participant in the crisis environment.

Another important result is the gradual transition from personalized to distributed leadership. Recovery is not associated with a direct replacement for All Might or another individual Symbol of Peace.

Responsibility is distributed among professional heroes, U.A. students, educational institutions, and civilians. This corresponds to distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011), in which organizational resilience is supported not only by vertical authority but also by interaction among participants at different systemic levels.

The theoretical contribution lies in clarifying relationships among trust personalization, crisis mediatization, and institutional legitimacy. A symbolic leader's crisis spreads across an organizational system under three interconnected conditions: a high concentration of public trust in one figure, underdeveloped mechanisms of symbolic succession, and failure to construct an alternative public narrative of stability in a timely manner. The narrative enables analysis not only of individual decisions but of the full communication dynamics through which trust is constructed, eroded, and gradually restored.

The practical contribution lies in applying the identified model to crises in actual organizations whose reputations depend heavily on the public image of a founder, executive, or other symbolic figure. Organizations can reduce these risks by preparing succession mechanisms, distributing communication functions, maintaining the institutional visibility of other management participants, and ensuring consistency between crisis messages and practical action. The results may also support education in management, crisis communication, and social communication.

The findings further suggest that a symbolic leader may serve as the bearer and public embodiment of organizational culture. All Might represents not only physical security but also the professional hero system's normative understandings of responsibility, self-sacrifice, control, and public service. His loss of symbolic legitimacy therefore calls into question both individual leadership effectiveness and the cultural foundations of the system. Excessive identification of organizational values with one figure simultaneously impedes their institutionalization and transfer to successors.

Research Limitations.

The results should be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations arising primarily from the study's qualitative theoretical-analytical design and its use of narrative as an environment for interpreting crisis-management processes. The analysis relies mainly on the conceptual synthesis of contemporary approaches to crisis management, organizational trust, and narrative analysis rather than quantitative empirical research on organizational behaviour or actual corporate crisis cases.

Narrative analysis is inherently interpretive. Defining the boundaries of narrative situations, assigning them to coding categories, and establishing causal relationships among crisis events, management decisions, and stakeholder responses depend to some extent on researcher interpretation. The corpus is also limited to the first six seasons; subsequent narrative developments and potential changes in the model of symbolic leadership are not considered.

A further limitation is the use of My Hero Academia as an analytical model of crises of trust and symbolic leadership. Despite its heuristic value, fictional narrative dramatizes conflicts, simplifies management processes, and intensifies the emotional dimension of crises. The findings therefore cannot be transferred directly to every organizational system without considering sectoral characteristics, cultural context, and the specific features of actual management environments.

Future research should examine crises of trust empirically in actual organizations, compare media models of leadership across different narrative forms, and investigate how digital communication environments transform organizational resilience and crisis communication.

Conclusions and prospects for further research

The study establishes that loss of trust in contemporary communication and management environments develops from a localized reputational risk into a complex destabilizing factor affecting the legitimacy of decisions, coordination of organizational processes, and systemic resilience. Crises unfold simultaneously in operational and symbolic-media spaces; effective crisis management therefore depends both on practical outcomes and on the organization's capacity to sustain public trust, communication transparency, and symbolic legitimacy.

The analysis of My Hero Academia shows that constructing All Might as the Symbol of Peace provides short-term stability for the professional hero system while excessively personalizing institutional trust. The public exposure of his physical vulnerability and retirement create a crisis of symbolic succession because the formal transfer of functions does not automatically transfer public legitimacy. The leader's personal crisis consequently spreads across the professional hero system.

Mediatization is a key mechanism in this transformation. Public exposure of All Might's vulnerability makes the system's concealed dependence on a charismatic leader collectively visible. Subsequent management and communication failures intensify doubts concerning the competence of hero institutions, transforming a reputational crisis into a crisis of institutional legitimacy.

Trust restoration requires transparency, crisis communication, institutional continuity, organizational learning, and distributed leadership. Recovery in My Hero Academia is not associated with another individual Symbol of Peace but with collective responsibility shared among professional heroes, students, educational institutions, and the public.

The principal finding is that personalized institutional trust has a dual effect: it enables short-term mobilization and symbolic stability but creates long-term organizational vulnerability when succession mechanisms are absent. My Hero Academia visualizes this process and represents a transition from stability based on one charismatic leader's authority to distributed responsibility and the collective maintenance of trust.

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between institutional trust, leadership legitimacy, and crisis decision-making through a narrative analysis of the anime series *My Hero Academia*. The study is motivated by the growing dependence of contemporary organizations on the public authority of individual leaders and by the resulting vulnerability of institutional systems when a symbolic leader loses legitimacy, visibility, or the capacity to maintain an image of stability. The purpose of the article is to identify the narrative mechanisms through which trust is concentrated around a charismatic leader, transformed into institutional dependence, undermined during a leadership crisis, and gradually restored through alternative models of responsibility and communication.

The study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach. Its analytical corpus comprises the first six seasons of the anime series, covering Episodes 1–138 released between 2016 and 2023. Narrative situations were selected purposively from story arcs representing the construction of All Might as the "Symbol of Peace", the public exposure of his physical vulnerability, his retirement, the crisis of symbolic succession, and the subsequent decline of trust in the professional hero system. Particular attention was paid to the Kamino Incident, Pro Hero, Paranormal Liberation War, and Dark Hero arcs. The units of analysis were story arcs and completed narrative episodes containing a crisis event, a managerial or communicative decision, stakeholder reactions, and consequences for institutional trust and legitimacy. The selected material was examined using the categories of trust object and type, symbolic leadership, crisis decision-making, communication strategy, stakeholder response, institutional legitimacy, and trust-restoration mechanisms.

The findings indicate that All Might's symbolic leadership produces a dual organizational effect. In the short term, the personalization of trust strengthens collective mobilization, reduces public anxiety, and supports the perceived stability of the professional hero system. In the long term, however, it makes institutional legitimacy excessively dependent on the authority and public image of a single individual. The public disclosure of All Might's vulnerability and his subsequent retirement therefore generate not merely a personal leadership crisis but a broader crisis of symbolic succession. The formal transfer of professional functions to other heroes does not automatically transfer the social legitimacy accumulated by the former leader.

The analysis further demonstrates that media exposure transforms the concealed vulnerability of the leader into a collectively experienced institutional crisis. Inconsistent decisions, ineffective communication, increasing threats, and the inability of professional heroes to meet established public expectations gradually extend distrust from individual actors to the entire system. Trust restoration begins when the narrative moves away from the search for another individual "Symbol of Peace" and toward transparency, empathetic crisis communication, institutional continuity, organizational learning, distributed leadership, and collective responsibility.

The article contributes to crisis communication and organizational research by clarifying the relationship between personalized trust, symbolic leadership, crisis mediatization, and institutional legitimacy. It also demonstrates the analytical potential of anime narratives for examining organizational behaviour and leadership crises. Although fictional narratives cannot be directly equated with real organizational environments, they provide a structured model for tracing how trust is constructed, destabilized, and restored across interconnected crisis events.

References:

1. Adi, T. W., & Arijanti, S. (2025). Reputational Risk in the Social Media Era: A Case Study of Crisis Management Strategies for Major Brands in Indonesia. *Oikonomia: Journal of Management Economics and Accounting*, 2(4), 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.61942/oikonomia.v2i4.411>
2. Akdeniz, E. (2020). Weber's charismatic leadership in times of crisis. *Journal of International Social Research*, 13((13/73) Business), 830–835. <https://doi.org/10.17719/jisr.11054>
3. Argyris, C., & Schön, D. A. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*. Addison-Wesley.
4. Badu, J., Kruke, B. I., & Saetren, G. B. (2023). Crisis communication and trustworthiness among crisis actors: towards a typology of crisis management difficulties. *Safety in Extreme Environments*, 5(2), 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42797-023-00074-8>
5. Bolden, R. (2011). Distributed Leadership in Organizations: A Review of Theory and Research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(3), 251–269. Portico. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x>
6. Contreras-Pacheco, O. E., Claasen, C., & Garrigós-Simón, F. J. (2022). Stakeholder perceptions in organizational crisis management: Exploring alternative configurations. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 30(5), 1344–1365. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2022.55>
7. Eaddy, L., Vijaykumar, S., Jin, Y., Lu, X., Sharma, S., & Raamkumar, A. S. (2025). Trust erosion framework for organisational responses to and management of global emergencies. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.70039>

8. Gerde, V. W., & Foster, R. S. (2007). X-Men ethics: Using comic books to teach business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 77(3), 245–258.
9. Habermas, J. (1975). *Legitimation crisis* (Vol. 519). Beacon Press. <https://bit.ly/4x8dwnK>
10. House, R. J., & Shamir, B. (1993). Toward the integration of transformational, charismatic, and visionary theories. In M. M. Chemers & R. Ayman (Eds.), *Leadership theory and research: Perspectives and directions* (pp. 81–107). Academic Press.
11. Hudoshnyk, O. V., & Krupskiy, O. P. (2023). Media possibilities of comics: Modern tools for the formation and presentation of organizational culture. *European Journal of Management Issues*, 31(1), 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.15421/192304>
12. Jamal, J., & Abu Bakar, H. (2015). The Mediating Role of Charismatic Leadership Communication in a Crisis: A Malaysian Example. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 54(4), 369–393. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488415572782>
13. Kim, R. Y. (2025). The internal effects of corporate “tech ethics”: how technology professionals evaluate their employers’ crises of moral legitimacy. *Socio-Economic Review*, 23(4), 1683–1703. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwaf043>
14. Krupskiy, O. P., & Stasiuk, Yu. M. (2023). Storytelling as a tool for forming and supporting organisational culture in medical institutions. *Communications and Communicative Technologies*, 23, 134–144. <https://doi.org/10.15421/292321>
15. Kumalasari, A., Musa, H. G., Garad, A., Emovwodo, S. O., & Aditasari, K. (2024). How digital communication transparency and public trust shape crisis communication through public engagement. *Komunikator*, 16(2), 182–195. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jkm.24485>
16. Liang, L., & Huang, Y.-H. C. (2023). Victim, villain, or scapegoat? Mediating organizational crises embedded in social problems and the transformation of order. *Communication Monographs*, 90(3), 317–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2023.2202717>
17. Marks, J. H. (2023). Trust in crises and crises of trust. *Hastings Center Report*, 53(S2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/hast.1518>
18. Nagasaki, K., & Mukai, M. (Directors). (2016-2023). *My Hero Academia* (Seasons 1–6, Episodes 1–138) [TV series]. Bones.
19. Naumenko, Yu., Krupskiy, O., & Stasiuk, Yu. (2025). Modern models and tools for managerial decision-making in the service sector. *Galician Economic Journal*, 96(5), 142–152. https://doi.org/10.33108/galicianvisnyk_tntu2025.05.142
20. Page, T. G., Zhou, A., & Capizzo, L. W. (2023). Finding the path beyond reputation repair: A structural topic modeling analysis of the crisis communication paradigm in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 49(4), 102349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2023.102349>
21. Peden, M. (2024). Legitimation crisis. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Political Science* (pp. 362–363). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800375918.ch78>
22. Sohn, Y. J., & Lariscy, R. W. (2013). Understanding Reputational Crisis: Definition, Properties, and Consequences. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(1), 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2013.795865>
23. Vázquez-Martínez, U. J., Morales-Mediano, J., Leal-Rodríguez, A. L., & Pennano, C. (2024). Navigating the storm: How managers’ decisions shape companies in crisis. *Review of Managerial Science*, 19(5), 1567–1597. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-024-00801-w>
24. Willner, A. R., & Willner, D. (1965). The Rise and Role of Charismatic Leaders. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 358(1), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626535800109>
25. Xiao, J., Lin, Y., & Xu, J. (2025). Trust in crisis: Media, risk, and avoidance. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2025.2589335>

Посилання на статтю:

Krupskiy O.P. *Institutional Trust and Leadership Legitimacy in Crisis Decision-Making: A Narrative Analysis of the Anime Series My Hero Academia* / O.P. Krupskiy, M.N. Cunha, Yu.M. Stasiuk // *Економіка: реалії часу. Науковий журнал*. – 2026. – № 4 (86). – С. 61-78. – Режим доступу: <https://etr.economics.net.ua/files/archive/2026/No4/61.pdf>. <https://doi.org/10.15276/ETR.04.2026.6>. <https://zenodo.org/records/22725639>.

Reference a Journal Article:

Krupskiy O.P. *Institutional Trust and Leadership Legitimacy in Crisis Decision-Making: A Narrative Analysis of the Anime Series My Hero Academia* / O.P. Krupskiy, M.N. Cunha, Yu.M. Stasiuk // *Economics: time realities. Scientific journal*. – 2026. – № 4 (86). – P. 61-78. – Retrieved from: <https://etr.economics.net.ua/files/archive/2026/No4/61.pdf>. <https://doi.org/10.15276/ETR.04.2026.6>. <https://zenodo.org/records/22725639>.



This is an open access journal and all published articles are licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0)